

Oct 27 2005 - Slaughter Meets with Colleagues, Ed Shultz to Discuss Lack of Political Balance on Ame

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Calls for Inspector General Investigation into Partisan Bias of AFN Programming

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today met with Representatives Steve Israel (D-NY-2) and Earl Pomeroy (ND-At Large) to discuss the lack of political balance on the American Forces Radio Network. Progressive radio talk show host Ed Shultz was also in attendance at the meeting.

"We have to send a message loud and clear that censorship of political views in the United States of America is not going to be tolerated," Rep. Slaughter said, "definitely not for the political gain of one party over another, and especially not at the expense of some of our bravest citizens."

At the meeting, Rep. Slaughter called for an investigation by the Pentagon's Inspector General into exactly why progressive programming has yet to be included on AFN Radio. An official letter requesting such an investigation is currently being circulated to Members of Congress and will be forwarded to the Inspector General's office. In the letter, Rep. Slaughter also requests a full examination of the recent decision to cancel the previously scheduled launch of the Ed Shultz radio program, a decision some believe was the result of political retribution at the hands of the Bush administration.

"Department of Defense regulations state the programming on the American Forces Radio and Television Service is 'provided without censorship, propagandizing, or manipulation,'" the letter reads. "Given the lack of diversity on AFN stations, we are concerned that this regulation is not being obeyed."

"It is therefore critical that you conduct an investigation into the motivation behind canceling Mr. Shultz's program, and the continued delay in providing progressive programming on AFN Radio," the text continues. "We cannot in good conscience ask the soldiers who are already sacrificing so much to also give up access to diverse views. The Pentagon must do its part to ensure that our troops are not asked to sacrifice their freedom of information while they are in service to our nation."

BACKGROUND

AFN broadcasts to American troops abroad through over 1,000 outlets in more than 175 countries. Despite the fact that American Forces Network Radio is completely supported by taxpayers, it does not have the political balance it should. Currently, conservative pundit Rush Limbaugh gets the only one-hour slot devoted exclusively to partisan political talk.

According to a pre-established agreement, the Ed Shultz Show was supposed to join the AFN Radio line-up on October 17th, but it was unexpectedly cancelled that morning by Pentagon officials. The individual who informed Mr. Shultz's producer of the show's cancellation was Allison Barber, a Pentagon communications aide whom Mr. Shultz had previously criticized for her coaching of U.S. troops at a recent media event before they participated in what had been billed as an impromptu dialogue with President Bush.

A list of those who participated in the meeting, in addition to the complete text of the letter to Mr. Gimble, can be found below:

Text of Letter to Mr. Gimble:

Mr. Thomas F. Gimble

Acting Inspector General

U.S. Department of Defense

400 Army Navy Drive

Arlington, VA 22202-4704

Dear Mr. Gimble,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the Department of Defense's refusal to carry "The Ed Schultz Show" on the American Forces Network (AFN) Radio as scheduled, and to ask that you launch an immediate investigation into the Pentagon's delay in providing balanced programming on AFN Radio.

The current AFN Radio schedule includes radio programming by well-known, right-wing talk show hosts including Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Rush Limbaugh. We strongly support soldiers' access to social and political commentary; however, we are troubled by the apparent lack of diverse views available on AFN Radio. In addition, efforts to include progressive programming appear to be constantly stymied by overtly burdensome review processes and miscommunications.

Last month, an e-mail received by Jones Radio, the distributor of "The Ed Schultz Show," from the Chief of the Radio Division for AFN, stated, "AFN Radio has squared away everything on our end to begin carrying the first hour of 'The Ed Schultz Show' each day, beginning Monday, October 17, 2005." However, at 7:00 a.m. on October 17, the producer of Mr. Schultz's program received a phone call from the Pentagon's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Internal Communications, Allison Barber, informing him that the program had been pulled from AFN Radio's schedule without offering any explanation.

To date, the Department of Defense has denied allegations that the debut of Mr. Schultz's show was cancelled due to political motivations or in retribution for comments the host made in the days prior to the scheduled launch of "The Ed Schultz Show." In those comments, Mr. Schultz criticized the Department of Defense and Ms. Barber for staging a video conference press event between the President and US troops. Instead, the Department has since claimed that it is continuing to review a number of programs in an attempt to provide more diversity to AFN Radio. We are concerned that the length of the program review process is unnecessarily impeding our troops' access to balanced, diverse programming. In addition, we are worried that the review process utilized for the selection of progressive programming is more stringent than that used for conservative programming.

Department of Defense regulation states the programming on the American Forces Radio and Television Service is "provided without censorship, propagandizing, or manipulation." Given the lack of diversity on AFN stations, we are concerned that this regulation is not being obeyed. In your Mission Statement as Inspector General, you describe your role "as an extension of 'the eyes, ears, and conscience' of the Secretary." It is, therefore, critical that you conduct an investigation into the motivation behind canceling Mr. Schultz's program, and the continued delay in providing progressive programming on AFN Radio.

We cannot in good conscience ask the soldiers who are already sacrificing so much to also give up access to diverse views. The need to provide our deployed servicemen and women with more diverse programming has been recognized

and supported by Congress. The Pentagon must do its part to ensure that our troops are not asked to sacrifice their freedom of information while they are in service to our nation. We ask that you do your part by examining the review process for all programming permitted on AFN Radio. In addition, we request that you investigate the application of the review process on conservative and progressive programs to determine if it is objectively applied, and provide an analysis of the diversity of programs currently broadcasting on AFN Radio.

We appreciate your attention to this request, and we await your response.

List of those who participated in the meeting:

Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28)

Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY-2)

Congressman Earl Pomeroy (ND-At Large)

Jones Radio Network Host Ed Schultz